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Talking Points for the DCI
(20 December 1983)

Arafat and his approximately 4,000 fighters left Tripoli this morning aboard five Greek ships. [REDACTED]

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His popularity is high among the Palestinian population, but he heads a permanently divided PLO, and he will probably fail to translate his popularity into significant political gains.

- Arafat still enjoys widespread support among the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, and the Gulf States, but his popularity masks a fundamental political weakness.
- The support of the Palestinian civilians gives him little real leverage in Middle East politics.
- The split in Fatah has deprived him of his once dominant power base in the PLO.
- He seems more inclined to continue his vague and shifting diplomacy than to display courage and boldness. [REDACTED]

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Arafat seems ready to revive his dialogue with King Hussein, but he is unlikely to make the concessions that would allow Hussein to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians.

- He is unwilling to surrender the demand for the creation of a Palestinian state or the claim that only the PLO can represent the Palestinians.
- If he compromised on these points, he would violate resolutions of the Palestine National Council and jeopardize his claim to be the legitimate PLO leader--a move that would play into his opponents' hands. [REDACTED]

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Israel's likely refusal to offer concessions regarding the West Bank that would attract broad Palestinian support further narrows Arafat's negotiating options.

- His popular support would probably begin to erode if he approved negotiations without some evidence of Israeli flexibility, such as a freeze on settlement activity. [REDACTED]

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Hussein, for his part, is unlikely to enter negotiations without PLO approval unless the Arab states--particularly Saudi Arabia--support such a move.

- The moderate Arab states, however, do not seem ready to pay the price of antagonizing Syria and destroying the Arab consensus.

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- Some gesture of Israeli flexibility is probably the minimum needed to get the Arabs to reconsider. [redacted]

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Three major factions are now evident in the PLO.

- Arafat loyalists, probably the single largest bloc but not a majority.

- The Syrian-dominated radicals that favor "armed struggle" against Israel to the exclusion of the political option and want to remove Arafat as PLO Chairman. [redacted]

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- They will act largely as instruments of Syrian policy, especially in Lebanon. The implied threat of their use against the moderate Arab states gives Syria additional leverage against them.

- The "independent" Marxists, comprised of the two most important PLO groups after Fatah (the PFLP and DFLP). They support most of the radicals' policies, but want to keep Arafat as Chairman and to cooperate with Syria while remaining free of Syrian domination.

- A withdrawal of their support would probably topple Arafat. [redacted]

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Over the long term, Arafat is likely to retain his chairmanship only if he demonstrates his policies can bring results.

- The odds are against him, and in the absence of progress on the political front, the Syrian-backed radicals will probably gain additional adherents, even among Arafat loyalists. [redacted]

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